

## **IDENTIFYING CONTINUING AND NON-CONTINUING ADULT 4-H VOLUNTEERS: HOW HAVE THEY EVOLVED OVER TIME?**

**Ken Culp, III**, Assistant Professor  
The Ohio State University

### **Abstract**

*The initial component of a volunteer administration model is identification. Potential volunteers must be identified before they can be recruited, screened, selected, oriented, educated, empowered, recognized, evaluated or retained. Identifying who is most likely to volunteer is a key component of a volunteer recruitment initiative. Additionally, it is important to determine if differences exist between those individuals who continue their service of volunteerism for an extended period of time and those who terminate their service of volunteerism after three years of service or less. Moreover, it is important for Extension Educators to be aware of volunteer demographics and how these descriptive profiles may either remain constant or change over time. The purpose of this study was to identify the people most likely to volunteer for service as an adult 4-H leader. Findings from this study revealed that the profile of a typical Indiana 4-H volunteer during 1994 was remarkably similar to profiles of other 4-H and youth organizational volunteers from across the United States since 1950.*

Working with volunteers is an Extension tradition (Patton, 1990). Volunteers assume a wide range of responsibilities in 4-H and community organizations. Community leaders and Extension Educators/Agents make extensive use of volunteers by asking them to serve a variety of roles and duties and delegating responsibilities to them. Volunteer leaders have been central to the success of the 4-H program since its inception (Wessel and Wessel, 1982). Volunteers provide direct services to clients; perform both clerical and administrative tasks, contribute their public relations skills, fund-raising and grant writing talents, and often serve as policy makers, board members and advisors (Murk & Stephan, 1990).

Volunteers are an essential part of Extension and extend 4-H programs to vital parts of counties that might not otherwise be served (Steele, 1994). Volunteers continue to be vital in this age of issues programming and National Initiatives for the Cooperative Extension Service (Patton, 1990). Extension benefits immensely from volunteers's work. It is estimated it would cost more than \$4.5

billion if Extension volunteers were paid for their services (Gallup, 1985).

A familiarity with various social background characteristics and their relationship to participation provides information on both "who" volunteers and to a limited extent, "why" they volunteer (Rohs, 1986). Those most ready to volunteer typically have a history of volunteering or serving in some unpaid position during their youth. Volunteering has become a way of life. Others learn to volunteer through early experiences in school, sports clubs, church groups, 4-H and Scouts (Zeutschel & Hansel, 1989).

Parents most readily volunteer in efforts benefitting their children. A distinct pattern of moving from one volunteer position to the next is found in parents, mostly mothers, who accompany their children through different educational institutions from kindergarten through secondary school. They become involved as classroom aides, as chaperones on excursions, or as helpers at special events; they are found on parent advisory boards and may be active volunteers or committee chairpersons (Zeutschel and Hansel, 1989).

Denmark (1971) found the “average” adult 4-H volunteer in Texas had a mean age of 41 years, served 5.1 years as a leader, completed 12.7 years of formal education, received an annual income of \$5,000 to \$14,999 and was affiliated with one to three organizations other than 4-H. Most leaders were married females with one to three children in 4-H. They were homemakers who spent an average of three hours a week as 4-H leaders. Denmark’s findings were consistent with those of Banning (1970) who, based on his study of 237 leaders in forty-two states found the following characteristics of adult volunteer 4-H leaders: 67% were between the ages of 36 and 55; 75% had from two to five children; leaders came from larger than average families and had lived in one place much longer than the national average. Nearly half had never belonged to 4-H as youth; more than 86% had graduated from high school and 20% were college graduates.

The findings of these researchers also confirmed an earlier study by Clark and Skelton (1950) which was conducted in twelve counties in New York. They reported that leaders who had led seven or more years differed from leaders who had dropped out after one or two years of service. On the average, the more highly tenured group was twenty-eight years of age or older when starting, were farm homemakers or public school teachers with twelve or more years of formal education, were farm or village residents, received above-average family incomes, had children in 4-H and had been selected by 4-H members’ parents.

Studying female adult volunteer 4-H leaders in Oklahoma, Parrott (1977) identified the “typical” leader as being: white, 35 to 44 years in age, married, with two to four children with the largest percentage having two children. Fifty-five percent were full- or part-time homemakers with 26.3% being full- or part-time teachers. In regards to education, 98.6% were high school graduates or above, with 37.8% being college graduates or above. Additionally, she found that 67.8% had been 4-H members themselves. Of these, 20.8% had

been members for at least four years while 20.8% had been members for nine or ten years. Parrott found that 83.7% of the 4-H leaders involved in her study had also been involved in volunteer work other than 4-H during the past year. Additionally, 59.9% of the 4-H leaders reported that their parents had been involved in the past or were currently involved in volunteer work. Of those married, 63.3% reported that their husbands were involved in some form of volunteer work other than 4-H.

Rohs and Lee (1989) called for a more thorough understanding of the factors associated with individual volunteer participation in the 4-H program as a means of enhancing retention and involvement in 4-H in addition to identifying and recruiting prospective volunteers. When Extension Educators/Agents are screening and selecting potential volunteers, it would be advantageous to determine if an applicant was more likely to volunteer for a limited or an extended length of time.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to identify those most likely to volunteer for service as an adult 4-H leader. The objectives of this study were to:

- Develop a demographic profile of the “typical” 4-H volunteer.
- Compare and contrast the demographic profiles of current and former adult 4-H volunteers.
- Compare and contrast the demographic profile of current 4-H volunteers with those from the last half of the twentieth century.

## Procedures

### Population and Sample

The population for this study included all adult volunteer 4-H leaders in Indiana, during 1994 (current leaders), and all former adult volunteer 4-H leaders in Indiana who had provided short-term service (three years or less, within the past five years) before terminating their position. The population was divided into three distribution layers for this study. The three layers were identified as follows: Cooperative Extension Service (CES) geographical Area, County Population and 4-H/Youth Development Extension Educator Stability within the county. At least one county from each of the ten CES Areas was included in the sample. County population was defined as rural (less than 50,000), suburban (50,000 to 100,000) and urban (over 100,000).

Extension Educator Stability was defined as follows: high stability (20 years or more of service as an Extension Educator - 4-H/Youth Development in the same county), low stability (three or more Extension Educators - 4-H/Youth Development within the past seven years) and moderate stability (intermediate between low and high.) Representative of Indiana's population, two urban, two suburban and nine urban counties and three high, seven moderate and three low stability counties were randomly selected. After satisfying the three stratification layers, the sample, which was representative of Indiana's population and Extension Educator stability levels yielded 13 randomly selected counties. The Extension Educator - 4-H/Youth Development in each of the 13 counties submitted their 4-H leader mailing lists, as well as identifying ten or more former 4-H leaders. The sample consisted of 1055 current and 128 former leaders from the thirteen counties. The resulting sample was surveyed comprehensively.

## Instrumentation and Data Collection

Data were collected via two four page survey instruments, one designed for current 4-H leaders and a second, with slight wording modifications for former 4-H leaders. Validity was established by a panel of five experts, including Departmental Extension Coordinators, State 4-H Specialists, and Education Administrators. In addition, the instruments were field tested with a group of nine current and two former 4-H leaders for content validity and reliability; however, because of the small number of respondents in the field test, reliability could not be established. The instruments contained 60 questions, 52 of which were quantitative and eight which were open-ended. Surveys were mailed to volunteers with follow-up postcards being mailed five weeks later to non-respondents. The final response rate was 46.83% (N=494) for current and 31.25% (N=40) for former volunteer leaders. A second follow-up with non-respondents was not attempted.

### **Analysis of Data**

Responses from the qualitative section of the survey were coded according to key word identification. Trends emerging from the open-ended findings were grouped categorically and evaluated utilizing descriptive statistics. Data from the quantitative questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-Square tests utilizing SAS 6.0 (SAS, 1991) to determine differences in the two populations. An alpha level of .05 was set a priori.

### **Results**

#### Who Volunteers?

A profile of the "typical" current Indiana 4-H volunteer during 1994 (Table 1) was as follows: a 42.5 year old female, who was formerly enrolled a 4-H member for 7.8 years and has served as a

volunteer leader for 7.24 years. Neither of her parents served as a 4-H leader. Her father was either a farmer or a laborer, her mother was a full time homemaker and she was raised in a family of 3.88 children, 2.23 of which were 4-H members. She was a high school graduate with 13.93 years of formal education, was married and her husband was either a laborer or a professional. Her spouse had a 31% likelihood of serving as a 4-H club leader. However, if her husband did serve as a 4-H leader, he did so for 6.7 years. She and her husband had a combined household income in the \$30,000 to \$50,000 range. Raised on a farm, she has also lived on a farm or in a rural area for 15.66 years and her home was 9.36 miles from the county seat. She had 2.4 children, 1.26 of which were currently enrolled in 4-H and she had a 90% likelihood of having all of her children either currently or formerly enrolled in 4-H (2.26 current or former children enrolled in 4-H). She had not experienced a job change during her period of volunteerism and had a career as a professional (clergy, lawyer, medicine, education, finance or the arts), a service worker (clerical, support staff, etc.) or a homemaker. She spent just under three hours per week volunteering for 4-H, was asked 1.17 times before agreeing to serve and volunteered for 2.48 other organizations besides 4-H.

#### Continuing vs. Non-continuing 4-H Volunteer Leaders

Continuing volunteer 4-H leaders differed from non-continuing their service in that they had more children enrolled in the 4-H program (2.26 vs. 1.84), had lived at their present location nearly twice as long (15.66 vs. 8.98 yrs.), spent less time per week volunteering for 4-H activities (173 vs. 245 minutes) and gave a more positive rating to their own 4-H club (2.29 vs. 2.65, where 1 = Excellent and 5 = Undesirable). (Table 1.)

### **Discussion**

#### Former 4-H Leaders

Former leaders were found to be similar to current leaders with only a few exceptions. While having a similar number of children, former leaders had fewer children currently or formerly enrolled in 4-H (1.84 as compared to 2.26 for current leaders.) This confirmed previous work by Banning (1970) who identified that 4-H volunteers came from larger than average families. Former leaders had lived in their present residence for nine years (as compared to nearly sixteen years for current leaders.) Banning also found that 4-H volunteers lived in one place longer than the national average. Former leaders spent just over four hours per week volunteering for 4-H activities (compared with less than three hours for current leaders.)

Finally, former leaders gave their own 4-H clubs a significantly less desirable ranking of 2.65 (1=Excellent, 5=Unsatisfactory) as compared with 2.29 for current leaders (Table 1). This lower ranking of their own club was interesting, particularly when coupled with the fact that former leaders spent in excess of one hour more per week of time volunteering for 4-H than did current leaders. It is possible that former leaders discontinued volunteering due to the amount of time they devoted to 4-H activities per week and still found their club failing to met their expectations.

This premise is supported by the Expectancy Theory (Balenger, Sedlacek & Guenzler, 1989) which postulated that people are motivated by expected outcomes. Volunteers serve an organization expecting certain motivational needs to be met. If these needs are unmet, it is likely the volunteer will discontinue his/her term of service. However, volunteers may also discontinue their service for positive reasons or due to circumstances beyond their control, including job changes, relocation, a change in family status or responsibility, a change of interests, stress, and health.

Table 1. Mean Values for Descriptive Variables for Current and Former Leaders

	Current Leader	Former Leader
Years as Township Leader	8.37 (±) 7.69*	4.14 (±) 3.34
Years as Project Leader	6.81 (±) 7.29	3.20 (±) 2.20
Years as Special Interest Leader	4.09 (±) 3.34	2.83 (±) 1.72
Age	42.51 (±) 10.03	40.35 (±) 8.23
Number of Children	2.40 (±) 1.38	2.53 (±) 1.36
Number of Children 9 - 19	1.26 (±) 1.14	1.23 (±) 1.29
Number of Children in 4-H	2.26 <sup>a</sup> (±) 1.14	1.84 <sup>b</sup> (±) 1.41
Years of 4-H Membership	7.83 (±) 2.85	7.89 (±) 3.00
Years Spouse Served as Leader	6.71 (±) 2.85	5.50 (±) 3.95
Years Lived at Present Home	15.66 <sup>a</sup> (±) 10.65	8.98 <sup>b</sup> (±) 7.51
Minutes/Week Volunteering	173.24 <sup>a</sup> (±) 198.55	244.90 <sup>b</sup> (±) 223.89
Years of Education	13.93 (±) 2.44	14.40 (±) 2.27
Organizations Volunteer For	2.48 (±) 1.64	2.51 (±) 1.57
Leader's Rating of 4-H Club	2.29 <sup>a</sup> (±) 0.94	2.65 <sup>b</sup> (±) 1.05
Number of Siblings Including Self	3.88	3.88
Number of Siblings in 4-H Including Self	2.23	2.08
Marital Status	7.89% single 87.25% married	0.00% single 90.00% married
Current Residence	44.0% farm 34.62% rural	32.50% farm 32.50% rural
Volunteer's Occupation	19.02% homemaker 21.68% professional 21.47% service 7.98% part-time homemaker	25.00% homemaker 25.00% professional 20.00% service 15.00% p-t homemaker
Income Range		
\$20 - \$30 K	16.93%	15.38%
\$30 - \$40 K	22.57%	28.21%
\$40 - \$50 K	21.67%	17.95%
\$50 - \$60 K	13.32%	23.08%

\*Mean (±) SD; <sup>a</sup>Means with unlike superscripts within rows are statistically different at p ≤ .05.

No former leaders were found in either single or divorced categories. The frequency of former leaders living on farms or in rural areas was 32.5% and 32.5%, respectively, as compared with 43.99% and 34.62%, for current leaders. Moreover, former leaders were more likely to be living in town than were current leaders (35% vs. 24.39%).

Current leaders were raised in homes with a full-time homemaker; a mother who was perhaps more accessible with greater time flexibility to devote to volunteerism and outside activities. The mothers of former leaders were more likely to be employed outside of the home as well as being more likely to have been employed in a profession.

#### Comparing the Demographic Profiles of 4-H Volunteers

The “average” 4-H volunteer in this study confirmed previous findings of many researchers. In the broadest sense of volunteerism, these findings corroborated those of Enders and Fanslow (1981) and Zeuschel and Hansel, (1989) who identified 1) married women with children and 2) homemakers with children in school as the most likely candidates for volunteering. Additionally, findings by Gallup (1989) were supported by this study in that volunteers are likely to have education beyond high school. The results of this study were remarkably similar to those of Clark and Skelton (1950), Banning (1970), Denmark (1971), and Parrott (1977), indicating that the profile of typical 4-H volunteers have not changed during the past half-century (Table 2).

#### Comparing Demographic Profiles From 1950 to 1994

The results of this study confirmed that the demographic descriptions identifying the “average” 4-H volunteer will yield a description which has remained constant for at least the past 45 years. The only demographic indicators which changed were that current leaders raise fewer children and

were more likely to be employed outside of the home for at least part of the work week. While society has evolved during the past half century, those descriptors identifying 4-H leaders have remained constant. Although the family is different in 1996 than it was in 1950, the “traditional” 4-H leader has come through the past half-century relatively unchanged. 4-H volunteers today are married mothers or 4-H members with rural backgrounds. Additionally, regardless of the activity, those who volunteer to work with youth activities are similar without regard to the youth organization which they serve (Zeustchel and Hansel, 1989).

### **Conclusions**

1. The profile of the “average” 4-H volunteer, as identified by this study, was a 43 year old married woman whose children were involved in the 4-H program. Born and raised on a farm, she had 14 years of education, was likely a 4-H member and had served as a 4-H volunteer more than 7 years.
2. Current and former volunteers were demographically similar with four notable exceptions: former leaders had fewer children enrolled in 4-H programs, had lived in their homes a shorter period of time, spent more than one hour per week more than current 4-H volunteers on 4-H activities and gave their own 4-H clubs a significantly lower rating than did current leaders.
3. Because 4-H volunteers were likely to become involved due to previous 4-H membership, their own children’s involvement, or anticipating and understanding the benefits of the 4-H Program, it is possible that the 4-H volunteer profile is a function of who joins the 4-H program. The demographic profile of a volunteer involved with the 4-H program has

Table 2. Comparison of Findings of Demographic Variables Identifying 4-H Leaders

Demographic Variable	Clark & Skelton 1950 New York	Banning 1970 42 states	Denmark 1971 Texas	Parrott 1977 Oklahoma	Culp 1996 Indiana
Age		65% = 36-55	41	39.74	42.51
Sex	F	F	76.8% F	100% F	71.86% F
Marital	M	M	95.9% M	96% M	87.25% M
Education	12+	86% HS 20% College	12.7	98.6% HS 37.8% Coll.	13.93
Occupation	HomeMakers Teachers	48.9% HM 28.8% Teach	61.8% HM	55% HM 26.3% Teach	Profess. 22% Service 21% HM 19%
Income	above average		64% \$5-15K		\$30 - \$50 K
4-H mem. Yr			36.4% = 1.6	67.8%=3.5	7.83
No Children	yes		2.8	2.6	2.4
Kids in 4-H	yes		2	2.1	2.26
Years as Ldr	7		5		7.24
Vol. min/wk			180		173
No. Vol Org.			2.8	83.7%	2.48

remained relatively constant for the past half century.

- Volunteer 4-H leaders were similar across time and geographic location. While society and the environment have both changed greatly during the past half century, the demographic indicators which described adult volunteer 4-H leaders have not. The only major differences between 4-H leaders in 1950 and 1994 were both reflections of societal evolution; they had fewer children and were more likely to work outside of the home.

## References

- Balenger, V.J., Sedlacek, W.E. & Guenzler, M.A. (1989). *Volunteer activities and their relationship to motivational needs: A study of the stamp union program research report*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland, Counseling Center. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 316 798).
- Banning, J.W. (1970). *Recruiting and training 4-H leaders--What studies show*. Washington DC: Cooperative Extension Service, USDA and State Land Grant Universities Cooperating, 1970.

Clark, R.C. Jr., & Skelton, W. (1950). *The 4-H club leader*. New York State College of Agriculture, Bulletin 94. Ithaca: Cornell University.

Denmark, K.L. (1971). *Factors affecting the identification, recruiting and training of volunteer 4-H adult leaders in Texas*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Texas A & M University, College Station.

Enders, L.E. & Fanslow, A.M. (1981). Volunteer service of professional home economists. *Home Economics Research Journal X*, 2, 120-126.

Gallup, G.H. (1989). *The Gallup poll: Public opinion 1988*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1990.

Johnstone, J. & Rivera, R. (1965). *Volunteers for learning: A study of the educational pursuits of American adults*. Chicago: Aldine.

Murk, P.J. & Stephan, J.F. (1990). *Volunteers enhance the quality of life in a community or (How to get them, train them and keep them)*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education. Salt Lake City, UT: October 28 - November 3). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 326 639).

Parrott, M.A. (1977). *Motivation, personal and social characteristics of 4-H leaders*. Unpublished M.S. thesis. Oklahoma State University, Stillwater.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). Editors introduction. *Journal of Extension*, Fall, 1990, pp. 21. Madison, WI: Journal of Extension.

Rohs, F.R. (1986). Social background, personality and attitudinal factors influencing the decision to volunteer and level of involvement among adult 4-H leaders. *Journal of Voluntary Action Research*, 15, 1, pp. 87-99. Jan-Mar, 1986.

Rohs, F. R. & Lee, G.B. (1989). *Personal factors associated with volunteering in 4-H among middle school teachers*. Paper presented at the Association of Voluntary Action Scholarship Conference, Washington, DC: National 4-H Center. Oct, 1989.

Rouse, S.B. & Clawson, B. (1992). Motives and incentives of older adult volunteers: Tapping an aging population for youth development workers. *Journal of Extension*, Fall, 1992. Madison, WI: Journal of Extension. (pp 9-12).

SAS Institute, Inc. (1991). *SAS Institute for Linear Models, Third Edition*. Cary, NC: SAS Institute, Inc.

Wessel, T. & Wessel, M. (1982). *4-H: An American idea 1900-1980*. Washington, D.C.: National 4-H Council.

Zeuschel, U. & Hansel, B. (1989). *The AFS volunteer resources study: Summary of findings from Germany study*. New York: AFS International/Intercultural Programs, Inc. Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 322 053).